

**Hanni Lichtenstern (Johanna Metzger)  
born 1916 in Berlin, died 2012 in London**

**Emigrated to the UK in 1939 on a Domestic Service Visa. Was involved in the music of the synagogue, together with her husband Paul Lichtenstern, from the early years.**



**Hanni Lichtenstern was interviewed by Dr Bea Lewkowicz on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2000.**

*Perhaps we can start the interview by you telling me a bit about yourself and your family background?*

Well, yes, as I said before, I was born in Berlin. My father came from Poland, my mother from Latvia. I had two older sisters, and had to leave, didn't have to, but said I will leave my school which was the Louisen-Lyceum in the Ziegelstraße, Berlin. As soon as Hitler won the elections in 1933, I was told by my very upset class teacher that I mustn't think I was by then the only Jewish girl in the form. I stuck at it until April and then I left, so I never finished my schooling.

*How old were you in 1933?*

I was 16. For a long time, there was nothing, one didn't know what one can do, there was nothing yet provided by the Jewish community for instance, later on they started or organise themselves. And I went to the Nelly Wolff College for Education of the young girls, for *die jungen Mädchen, die die Schule nicht beenden konnten*. Oh Gott, my German! And so that lasted for one and a half years and I was taught kindergarten, to look after children, and *Hauspflege*. I worked in several kindergarten, different ones. I finished that course. Before that, I had had the idea, I wanted to go to Palestine. And I went on *Hachshara* to Denmark. I didn't stay long, that was a very painful experience, I was young and everybody there was young, so I thought I had fallen for one of them who had finished his training and he went straight to Palestine, and I went with him. Not with the permission of the farmer, it was very bad, I am still

ashamed of it. But I never married the boy, because everything looked very different then. So, this is just to explain how the time went.

*Which year was that, when did you emigrate to Palestine?*

I didn't. No, no, I never went.

*Oh, you just left the Hashara?*

Yes. I had two elder sisters and my parents, when I sent a telegram, I am coming home after not even two months there, I got one back, 'stay where you are'! But of course, I wouldn't listen, I was a real stupid goose. And of course, in Berlin I felt I had done a very stupid thing. We are still in touch - this chap, for Rosh Hashanah there is always a letter. Then I went to the Nelly Wolff Heim, which was very useful, and when that was finished, I still had no possibility to go anywhere, but I started a little kindergarten, a private one. And there were plenty of children, Jewish, there was no Jewish kindergarten, there were some, but a few. It was all in between everybody hurried and tried to emigrate, obviously. And it was good; the parents were only happy to have someone to look after the children. And I also did some work with older children, to help because they had no more schooling. That was that. And my sister Meta, who was the middle one, was the first one to emigrate. She was always very determined, she had been a worker for the Deutsche Bank. And we had an old friend of my mother's also from Latvia, who we called aunt, although she wasn't our aunt. She was very old, looked incredible, very strong in her way. Through her I learned some English even in Berlin. And she went to live with friends in Dublin. My sister wrote to her and she got her over. Meta was the first to leave.

*When did your sister leave?*

1937. And then my elder sister, somebody came through friends or relatives from Montevideo and looked for a wife and he married my sister very quickly, within days. My father afterwards was taken to camp, and I was with my mother alone in Berlin. The very important thing for me was that I had always been singing, even as a small child. I was very musical, I loved music. But nothing could be done, nobody dreamt of doing anything about it. But during this study in the Nelly Wolff Heim there was one teacher who used to be an opera singer and she had a bad accident, and she couldn't appear on stage anymore. She was very upset, she said, you mustn't leave the music behind. I get sometimes very sentimental; you must forgive me. And she was new, Wilhelm Goodman was a singer there, you are so young, you don't know these names, he worked for the Städtische Oper, he was Jewish. He died on stage as Rigoletto actually, but fortunately that was in the Kulturverein. We were all members of the Kulturverein. I went to him and was so frightened and shy, and he said I can't say much, but I think there is something, let's start, and he taught me for there without accepting a penny, I couldn't pay. That's how the singing started. Through that and you know at this time we had to make our own entertainment. We belonged to the Jüdischer Kulturverein. They produced an operetta, *Die Schöne Galathee* by Franz von Suppé. Nobody knows it anymore. And I was the *Schöne Galathee*.

*So, you had the lead role?*

Yes. And of course it was accompanied on two pianos. One of the pianists, in the last minute, got a visa to Shanghai, and if you had a visa that time, it didn't matter where to, you left. So, they needed another pianist and that was Paul. That's the most important thing, that came all through the singing, had I gone to Israel, I wouldn't have had a singing career.

*What did you sing?*

Well, what one used to sing, the German Lieder, which I love. I always wanted to sing Aida and Wilhelm Goodman said, 'this is silly, you don't look like an Aida. It isn't you'. But he was always very moved when I sang Jewish songs which I love and adore. He said, you sing your Jewish songs, with your Jewish eyes, you give concerts and also provide the handkerchiefs at the same time, he was wonderful. I mean I have got all the files here - I sang everything. I could never sing Belcanto because I just haven't got that, but otherwise I sing songs in six different languages. Later on, I must say, through the times of war and all that, I sang in several synagogues for Lily Montagu for instance.

*We will get there, but for the moment we are still in Berlin, did you sing in synagogues at all?*

Yes, in the very liberal, what is it called?

*Lewetzowstraße?*

No, that was liberal. They even - men were not supposed to wear a cap there, Bach was sung, it was very right-wing so-to-speak. Why can't I remember the name? I will, later on.

*Why was it right-wing and not left-wing?*

I call progressive left-wing. And they were very - as liberal as you could be, there wasn't much Judaism left.

*And you sang in the choir?*

Yes, I did the solos there. But that was a short while, but it all happened in the last years, 1938 and 1939 and then I left. With regard to time, it wasn't so long.

*Did you meet Oberkantor Davidsohn?*

Oh, yes, I have got pictures. Yes, Oberkantor Davidson, 'meine lieben Freunde Lichtensterns'. But Dollinger, it's a pity you never heard him sing. That, and as a human being, he was exceptional. We had the first programme, he organised a programme, when I came during the war, it was 1940, in Miss Montagu's original synagogue, in Alfred Place. I can show you if you have time the programme. Within a week this was bombed, with the loss of many lives. That's when we became very close friends, also with his wife. The Dollingers.

*What happened to you after your sister left Berlin?*

Both sisters left.

*How did your second sister leave? Your first sister you said got a permit through your friend in Dublin.*

No, that was my second sister, she left first. My eldest sister married and went to Montevideo.

*And then?*

My mother and I were in this flat, very difficult, no money came in. That's why I had to earn money. Fortunately, my father had quite a number of relatives in America, as almost everybody had and everybody wanted to go to America. I am very glad we didn't, but that's a different matter. Through them, they were very good, they sent him some money into the camp, so he could have it easier with the food. We couldn't do anything for him.

Were you in touch with him?

We couldn't. It was dreadful. When he was fetched at 5 o'clock in the morning, we had the police living over us. We lived around the corner from Lewetzowstraße, in Wollenweberstraße Nummer 11. They shoved them like pigs, one after the other. I had a policeman in front of me, and I shoved him, that was stupid, but it was so - oh, well. I was there and round the corner was Lewetzowstraße which I saw burn of course. Why did I tell you this?

*You were telling me about your father's arrest.*

Yes, and the next morning we went to the Polish Embassy, stupidly, to think that they would help. It was locked up like a prison, they wouldn't open the door, nothing. It was dreadful, we couldn't get any answer, we pestered them as much as possible. Until we then heard, I am not quite sure how that came about, from the Jewish Gemeinde, that the camp was a *Zwischencamp*. Germany didn't want them, Poland wouldn't let them in. That's where they were. The most important thing in all this, my mother had a large family, relatives in Wales. My grandparents in Latvia had seven children, five girls, and the last two were boys, you can just imagine what that meant to Jewish parents. When they got to 17 and 18, when it meant that they would have to go to the Russian Army, my grandmother, who must have been an extraordinary woman, I have heard some stories.

*What was her name?*

I don't know her name. She was always grandmother, I have forgotten. I was two years when I saw her the one and only time. She said, 'on no account will I let my sons go into the Russian army'. And she, having these precious boys, gave them money, gave them some food, put them on a boat and said, 'You go. And if you find a place you like, - it was one of those cargo boats - you can stop and then you tell us where you are'. They first stopped in Wales, not for long, and they went on to South Africa. Neither of them liked it. The boat went on to America, and my older uncle Eli

said, yes, I will stay in America. But the little one, Daniel, he was very little actually, said, no, I will go back to Wales, I like Wales. Which he did and he married a girl from Latvia who was very tall and very strong. And they produced 15 children, ten of which survived, one was killed in the last war, there are still some alive.

*Where did they live in Wales?*

In Cardiff and Bangor. When we were bombed out, we had nowhere to go - my parents - we went to North Wales and lived for over a year in Bangor. It was wonderful for a child, there were no bombs or anything.

*Did they help you to get a visa? You said because of them you survived?*

Yes. My mother had lost touch with them. My sister in Dublin who was always very efficient, the most efficient one of the three of us, put an advert into the Jewish Chronicle. And they answered, that's how it came about. It's a wonderful story. And then they guaranteed for my father, with a little help from America, and then my mother came over, just about four or six weeks before me. Paul and I brought her to Hamburg, as she couldn't bear it any longer.

*So you were left on your own in Berlin?*

Yes, there was Fräulein Clara, a Jewish spinster who had lived with us. The Jews huddled together in a way. If someone had a flat like we had, we were in a way protected. Of course, Paul was with me all the time, he didn't stay there because he lived in Charlottenburg, but the days were spent together. Then at last this permission came for me to go. As I said, the job as a domestic had gone, but I found shelter with friends of mine. Relatives in Bangor who lived in Stamford Hill.

*So where did you arrive?*

I went by boat; everybody went by boat.

*From Hamburg?*

No, wait a minute, I went by train. I remember crossing the Dutch border, so it must have been a Dutch boat. I can't remember a thing about it. You only could have ten marks with you. But I had the help of these very good friends of my family, Domnitz, I remember the name.

And then, like with everybody else, Paul couldn't wait to get his visa to come to England and one of his pupils had gone to live in London, he was a young solicitor and he was engaged to an English-Jewish girl and the father gave a guarantee for Paul, that's how he came over. That was in August, when my father also was released. That summer, fortunately, the summer before the war broke out, we were all in England, we were very fortunate. Paul was considerably older than I, 13 years older. He had already started a very good career in Austria and then later on he'd also come to Berlin and had many pupils and lived quite well.

*He was a pianist?*

Yes, a concert pianist. But he also studied the organ for the *Auswanderung* and that's how he got the job in Oranienburger Straße.

*So he was the official pianist in Oranienburger Straße?*

Yes, the last one. I have got a photo there. You know, the Oranienburger Straße was a wonderful, wonderful synagogue. It was like a cathedral. As a child, being there, sitting there, listening to the choir and all that - I always thought I was in heaven. That anybody can sing that, that I would ever do that, it was impossible to imagine, but it was wonderful.

*What was it like there?*

Well, I can show you pictures. It was like a cathedral, it was very large, the upstairs for the women, although later seating became mixed. And very beautiful. The largest organ in Germany then. I have got two books about organs. So, it was very, very impressive. But I knew other synagogues, too, of course, like Pestalozzistraße.

*Was there a very sharp division between the 'liberale' and orthodox communities?*

Very, yes, I think they would have killed each other happily. But the one good thing which Berlin had was the divisions were there, but you had one *Jüdische Gemeinde* Großberlin. And everybody paid something towards it, it was much better organised. There is nothing like that here. Well, actually, the divisions here are still strong.

*What were the debates about?*

How much of pure Judaism you were talking, how much you let in a little bit of light, but then there was plenty of music written, not only Lewandowsky, others as well. But Lewandowski was the one. There was in Germany, especially amongst the more assimilated Jews, the great fear of the Jews from the East, the ghetto Jews, the Polish Jews. Just an example of it, my parents I am sure, when they were at home - I don't know my mother because they were speaking a lot of German, but Yiddish was spoken, when they were in Berlin not a word of Yiddish was spoken unless somebody came from abroad. And I regretted it very much, it would have been such a help, you know. I loved it very much. A great treasure of Jewish culture, because Yiddish literature and poetry is rich, it goes much deeper. I had great trouble when I started with Yiddish songs here. If it was for the Lodge, Yiddish songs, in the end they asked for them.

*Was there tension between Ostjuden, between orthodox and liberal? The members of the 'liberale' Gemeinden, where there less from the East?*

Not so many. At that time, the Scheunenviertel, the younger brother of my father's family, they lived in the Scheunenviertel. We went to see them. There was a big contrast, but they were very good, fine people. It's so hateful, especially amongst Jews, really.

[gets out pictures]

This was my father. And this was his younger brother, who perished.

*Now you could tell me how you got involved with Belsize Square Synagogue.*

HL: That came through Paul. He had immediately tried to make contact, and Lily Montagu, of whom you know of course, was a great help and a great supporter of the synagogue. She was one of those who guaranteed that Paul would be helped if he came.

*So he had contacted the synagogue?*

Belsize Square Synagogue, 1939 - we had nothing to do with them, because we had only just come. So, it started without us. But as soon as Paul came out, he didn't waste a minute, he got in touch. There was Melitta Heim playing, as you know very well. But I think, I have a feeling that Paul knew Davidsohn. Davidsohn was very fond of us, really, I must say. Paul very soon started with the synagogue which was a great help. But I, when we married - we married in March 1940 - it was difficult, my parents had just one room and a kitchen in Swiss Cottage. And my sister had, in the same house, another room, everybody shared the bathroom. It was in Swiss Terrace. Doesn't exist anymore, it was bombed out. It was very near the underground. I was there, sleeping on a mattress in the kitchen. Paul couldn't be there, and of course we weren't married yet. It was very hard for us, we went for walks as often as possible, we walked in Hampstead, past the townhall in Hampstead, Haverstock Hill. And we said, 'what does one do when one wants to marry', let's ask. So, we went in, and the chap took the pen and said, name? Address? Yes, you can marry on this and this date, which was the next Shabbat in a fortnight. We were so stupid. We came home and showed it to my mother, she said, are you crazy, she was so upset. My father didn't care, everything would have been fine for him. We wanted a very quiet wedding, we didn't want a fuss. We couldn't do that, because *Oberkantor* Davidsohn phoned, '*mein guter Freund Lichtenstern, Sie glauben doch nicht, dass Sie heiraten können, ohne dass der Chor und Ich singen*'. Oh God. So we were married in the Liberal Synagogue in St John's Wood, not in the big synagogue. And the choir was there from Belsize Square, *Oberkantor* Davidsohn was there. There was no organ and the choir was awful because they were out of tune. We felt like giggling, but you couldn't giggle. It was raining cats and dogs, everybody stood around dripping, it was the funniest wedding ever.

*Who was the rabbi?*

It must have been Salzberger. And I had a very good friend, who is long since dead, who had learned catering to make a living, and she provided for all our friends. It was so sweet. I remember she gave me a little milk jug from Woolworth, and it was wonderful, I still have it. We spent our honeymoon in Fellows Road. We had one room and kitchenette and a shared bathroom, and it cost 23 Shillings and 50 pence, I think per week. And Paul had, from this very generous father of Audrey, she said she saw to it that he had one pound every week, regularly. So that didn't work - if you have one pound and you spend 23 Shillings, it doesn't really work out. We were there I think for two week or something like that and then this chap took us in, the father of Audrey, because his wife had gone to stay in America during the war. And Paul was a

good cook, so we did the shopping for him and made sometimes something to eat. We had a room, that was in Wembley. It didn't last long, it lasted 5 weeks, because when we married - everybody had to have a permit obviously, when you came in from Austria or Germany you had to have a tribunal and then you were categorised as A, B or C. Paul had a C. Now when I came over, I came with a Polish passport, because my father was in the First World War and afterwards you could choose Germany or Poland, and he fortunately chose Poland. So, I was a friendly ally. When we married, I was categorised as B. I said, 'I beg your pardon, 5 minutes ago I was an ally, and now I am a suspect, how is that possible'? And they said, you will have a tribunal, don't worry. Five weeks later there was a knock on the door, 'come on, we take you to the police station', I exclaimed 'oh, it's a mistake'. 'They will send you back'. Well, they did send me back, but they said, keep a little case ready, just in case. They came again and I went straight to the Isle of Man. I was there for eight months.

*BL: Your husband wasn't interned but you were?*

Yes. We had been married for five weeks. It's not very wonderful to be split immediately after all this time. So, he went bonkers. I have got letters here. My sister said, I think Paul is exaggerating a little bit.

*Did he write to the Home Office?*

Oh yes, he did everything, through his pupil who was a lawyer. This was after the fall of Paris. Really, it was a dangerous situation. And Britain thought, all these people coming from Germany, we don't know what they will do. We were stuffed with real Nazis because there was a German Catholic *Schwesterbund* or something who walked the streets with Heil Hitler.

*Do you want to tell me anything about the internment?*

This will take until next week, so I won't start on it, but I will say one thing about my time on the Isle of Man. I learned a great deal, as you do. If you are in one place with about 1200 women only, it's not easy. In fact, it's quite horrific. I'd rather be with 1200 men I am quite sure, but, if you wanted to stay sane and survive and live through the day with some sort of meaning, you had to be active, you had to do things. We did extraordinary things, for instance we produced a Schubert concert. And the women got *Kreppapier* in different colours and made beautiful dresses out of it. Of course I had to sing. I sang in the church there. When I was released, the *Pfarrer* came, '*Frau Lichtenstern, ich muss Ihnen Auf Wiedersehen sagen*'.

*He was German?*

No, no, he was English, I don't know why I said it in German. Because I said *Pfarrer*.

One of the most important things - I met there and got very friendly with Dora Diamant. You know about Franz Kafka. Dora was there with her young daughter Marianne. She came from the East, she had a very strong Eastern Jewish background. She loved Yiddish songs and she taught me a great deal. We gave concerts there. And I am still very much involved with that, because there is tremendous research going on about Dora by Cathy Diamant who comes from America. When she studied

European literature and it came to Franz Kafka, Dora Diamant was mentioned, her professor said, Cathy, you have got the same name, maybe there is some connection. From that time on, it's at least 10 years ago, she has been travelling all over Europe, Israel - she is in Israel now, here, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August last year we had the *Einweihung* of the gravestone for Dora, because she didn't have one before. I have got a memorial for Marianne, the daughter here in Golders Green. And I have started translating from Yiddish which Dora wrote into English for the book which Cathy is going to write. The wonderful thing in life is all this comes so unexpectedly.

*So how are Dora and Cathy related?*

It's very unlikely that they are related. But what she has discovered, and the latest is that they have got through to the papers of the *Stasi* in East Berlin, and there is a *Lebenslauf*, dreadful to read, from the communist cell, it's not pleasant reading, but that's how it was. And these are secret papers, I have got a copy. So, it does go on, and all this research is leading somewhere again, she has written a play about this, where my second granddaughter, who is an actress, was reading, that was here in the Spiro Institute, my son has made it into a radio play.

*What is it called?*

Dora's story. She is now in Israel because there is an international women's conference. They knew about it and they spoke to her, that they would like her to come because this is so important. After all, a woman like Dora, again, all this comes together after all this time.

*What do you remember of her? You worked with her.*

Yes, she worked with me. I have got letters, she stayed longer in the camp with her daughter. I have hand-written letters from her from the camp which are also translated into English for the book.

*What sort of Yiddish songs did you sing?*

Yesterday I found the book, there were 140 which I sang regularly. Now in Osmond House we always finish with Yiddish and it's amazing, even the people who didn't have Yiddish - it just wakes them up. They are so warm, they are from life, you know. The Jews in the East, having this restricted life, had to express themselves. Everything was written about.

*So it was musical training for you?*

Not musical, no, Dora wasn't musical. She was a great personality.

*How old was she when you met her?*

She was born 1898, we met in 1940, 1942. And little Marianne was six years old. We were in the coach to Liverpool, and I had a seat and there was Marianne standing, the little girl, and I said, come sit on my - that's how it started. Incredible.

*So after eight months you came back?*

Yes, in the beginning of 1940.

*Where you released because your husband's petition was successful?*

He said, alright, if she can't come out, then I want to be interned, so he was interned for five months. But there was no camp for married couples, not at that time. We met only once, the men were brought by train, and we had a terrible *Kommandant*, I forgot her name, she hated everything which was soft. When the men came and we wanted to get to each other, 'keep apart, keep apart!' We could have killed her.

They had asked me to form a choir in the camp, which I did, and when it came to Christmas, Joanna Crookshank, that was her name, said, would I go and sing Christmas carols with the choir. I said, 'we can't, at five o'clock it's dark and we are not allowed'. She said, 'no, you will be allowed'. So, we had one very fat policewoman there and she was on a bicycle - it was dark, of course, no lights, it was curfew - and she had a light on her bicycle, and she peddled in front of us and we marched, the choir, behind her. Went from door to door and sang, Christmas songs, too, and Yiddish and Hebrew and German - it was wonderful! When it was finished, she had asked us to come to the headquarters and there was a big box full of little red apples. We were each allowed one apple. God, it was incredible.

I was interned twice, because they sent me back. I was also released twice. I had the release papers and when I came to Douglas, to the port, they said, 'no, we haven't got you on our list, you have to go back'. So, I went back, but only for a day or so. But it was all so unnecessary. You know, Paul always said - when Paul was interned, there were wonderful people there, the Amadeus quartet, they were there, and they performed, of course - Paul did all sorts of things, he also cleaned the streets because he got some pocket money and he sent it to me. There was no money otherwise. And lectures were given, the culture was all there. Once they had a visit from one of these English idiotic generals. He walked along and said, 'isn't it strange, I never knew there were so many Jews amongst the Nazis'. Can you believe that?

*Then you came back to London?*

Yes, and I had nothing. I knew I couldn't stay too long with the people, they were not well-to-do people, I couldn't contribute in any way. I tried to get work and that was very difficult. And in the end, I realised I couldn't stay with them, so where could I be. And they took me to the salvation army.

*Who is 'they'?*

Well, I was told I can go and stay at the salvation army until I found something. That was over the bridge in the South of London. It was a big room and each of us had a little cubicle, had some food. But there was also, of course, the *Heilsarmee*, salvation army, they love to sing. There was a harmonium, and we were singing, and when she heard that I could sing, she went, oh wonderful. So, I sang all these hymns with them. After a week I really had enough. And then I had a job, suddenly there was a job as a domestic servant in a suburb. I see it now, I blame myself, I hated being in my

position so very much, I saw everything through black glasses I am quite sure. But the fact was, this was very English, he used to be a mayor in a town, husband and wife and three children. An old-fashioned house, and you lit the fires always, and I had never lit a fire before. But she showed me. And I had a little room up under the roof and at six o'clock in the morning, it was winter, the bell rang. I couldn't sleep because I was afraid of this bell. They had to have early morning tea brought to their bedrooms and each had their own mug. But the three children had different mugs, so the one which Charles had couldn't be used by somebody else - and I had to remember all that - I hated it, what stupid people. Very bad. I did my work and I would have hated myself. It lasted one week, and then the very nice husband said one evening, 'come and have a drink with us', but I didn't want a drink. I wanted to be with Paul. He said: 'Look, Miss Metzger, I know you are trying your best, but we can see that you are not used to this kind of work. And instead of ten shillings he gave me 15, which was very nice of him'. So that was that.

After internment, we had nowhere to go of course. But Miss Montagu had a sister and she was evacuated, and she let her very lovely house in Portland Place near Bayswater. There was Rabbi Kokotek with his wife and their little daughter. And they said, yes, we can come and share, which was wonderful while it lasted. I loved little Sheila, she is not alive anymore. For some reason, which I still do not know the answer for, one day Miss Montagu asked us to come, and she said, 'I am sorry, but the Kokoteks would like you to leave the house'. Without a reason. We didn't know a reason. And I am really cross with myself, I now see it was cowardice, we were afterwards quite friendly, and I never had the courage to ask, why did you do that, what was the reason? Paul was a good Bridge player, he taught them to play Bridge, for example, I really don't know, now it doesn't matter.

Then we had nowhere to go, but we found the upper maisonette of a lovely house in 15 Carlton's Avenue in St John's Wood, to share. A very nice district. That also belonged to refugees, I am still friendly with Katja. That was fine. That was before my husband was attacked and nearly died.

#### *Attacked by whom?*

We were in this flat, it was the New Year from 1942, 1943. I had a friend, Eva Bauernfreund, to stay with us to spend the evening. She had a room in St Anne's Terrace, just around the corner from St John's Wood. After 12 o'clock she said, 'I am tired, I will go home'. And Paul, being a gentleman, said, 'don't go by yourself, I will take you home'. That was not far from Carlton's Avenue and the time passed and Paul didn't come back. And I couldn't sleep and then the phone rang. That was St John's Wood underground station: 'There is somebody who is badly hurt, he can remember this telephone number, he says his wife is there. Could you come?' So Peter came with me of course, when we came into the hall, there was Paul sitting. Full of blood and couldn't remember anything. He remembered afterwards what happened. He had taken Eva to her house. It was pitch dark and suddenly he felt a terrific bang on his head. It turned out there were some prostitutes living there, and some boy from the navy, who was very jealous and he had hidden in the bushes, believing that she was going with somebody else. He just heard a woman's voice and Eva went into the house, shut the door and said goodbye and Paul turned around to go home. And it was a miracle, it was a cold night, that he regained consciousness. He crawled on his knees

to where there was some light, which was the underground. Afterwards we heard from a couple, members of Belsize Synagogue, who had been out late, and said, 'very strange, we saw Mr Lichtenstern, he must have been very drunk, he was sitting in the street' - people who knew him walked past. Paul was very badly hurt, and they took him to the St John's Hospital, around the corner, which was very good. He was there for three weeks, it was a hairline - it never disappeared, but he was alive. And that was for me so horrible, I suddenly thought, my goodness, we hardly started our live and it's nearly gone. And I wanted a child, I had to have a child. It was so physical, I stopped at each pram. And I did get pregnant and had David exactly the next year, in January. We were bombed out when he was six weeks only. That was another miracle, because we were under the roof. He woke up when the bombers came, cried, and Paul said, you better feed him. He stood against the window to protect us. It got so bad that we went down to the cellar where the others were. They were all very friendly, and we stayed there until the morning. In the morning, we crawled up and, in his cot, where the pillow was, was the ceiling. We couldn't have survived that.

*You must have been one of the few people who had children at the time?*

Yes, Paul took me to the University College Hospital, you know how it was then, he couldn't stay, he had to go straight home. And he came the next day with an orchid, I don't know how he could afford that. And nobody was with me when I screamed and screamed and screamed for 12 hours. The next morning the sister said, you didn't really have to make such a fuss yesterday. I nearly said, how many babies have you had. Anyway, it was all worth it. No doubt about that.

*In 1944, where you involved with the synagogue?*

Paul was the organist, but not only there, also for the liberal. Friday night we were in Belsize Square, the new liberal congregation.

*Where was that?*

That was in Belsize Square, where it is now, only it was much smaller.

*But during the war? It couldn't have been, it must have been in one of the flats, because they moved in the fifties.*

Oh yes, you are quite right, it was in the next road. That's right, where Melitta was first playing and then Paul. And then on Shabbat morning he was also there, I think. And then the afternoon we were at Miss Montagu's in town, off Tottenham Court Road. Very active. And then on Sunday, for quite a long time they had a Sunday service, in the liberal, with Dr Mattuk. Later, I also taught the children there. The whole weekend. And then the concerts came.

*Do you remember Sunday afternoon activities and concerts at Belsize Square?*

Yes, that started also. Actually, it's good you speak of that. Davidsohn had started it. After all, he came from a culture quite different from Kokotek later on. They each had their gifts and all that, but the German-Jewish culture, that was really Davidsohn. Then later on with Dollinger it was combined, he came from Poland and he had

studied as a singer here, been on stage in Belgium and all that. So it was very interesting, each of them brought their own culture.

*We were talking about the Sunday events.*

Yes, I think it was Davidsohn who started it. He said there should be concerts, which were very popular and different people took part. With regard to the children's choir, that I founded, it was really a very worthwhile start.

*When was that started?*

I find it very difficult to put a year to it. It lasted so long.

*Was it after the war?*

Oh yes!

*I want to ask you about two people, about your impressions of Lily Montagu and of Davidson. Let's start with Lily Montagu.*

She was a great personality. It did not matter if you agreed with things she wanted. She came from a very assimilated top Jewish-English family, very rich, and very protected. But she had this religious streak, she had the deep religious feeling. For her, Judaism expressed how people should live and the meaning of life, the psalms, the prophets. She studied, I don't know how much she studied, I don't want to invent it. She also was a person with the urge to help. She didn't have to work, but she very soon started to think about the Jewish girls in the East End. She started this West Central Club. Somewhere there must be material which will give you the details which I can't give you. But the girls were taught sewing or whatever and regular services took place. When it came to the services, she felt she herself wanted to be the provider of the good news, sounds very Christian, I don't mean that. She was very well read in the English part of the Bible, I don't know how much she knew, I really don't know. She was adored by all the people who knew her, she was a very gentle soul. She was not a person for Smalltalk. She was tall, very impressive, both she and her sister, neither of them ever married. She was very fond of Paul and me, I would say she was a good friend. We would also give concerts there in the afternoon. I have letters from her. I know that she had enemies. There were people amongst our people who, I am afraid, thought her a bit ridiculous. She was dressed as if she was a rabbi. She was dignified and she had always something to say. Maybe what she said was, now I would probably also say, it was a little bit naïve, innocent, you know. She loved hymns, English hymns. We sang English hymns at services, now to me that was very strange. But since there were hymns based on psalms, that's fine. But it's a little bit simplistic. Her religion was not sophisticated. There was Dr Mattuk, who was a brain, a sermon by Dr Mattuk was really something to look forward to. He liked Paul very much. I admired Lily Montagu enormously. I was really fond of her, but if I was not working with Paul there, I would not go to listen to her sermons, I would go to Mattuk.

*You were in a peculiar situation, you were really working.*

*Yes, and gladly. People became friends. They were very friendly.*

*Why do you think was she interested in the German refugees?*

Because they were Jews who were maltreated, if not killed, so of course she had to open her doors. And they were liberals. You see afterwards, perhaps you understand better now, there was a feeling against them. Belsize Square didn't want to be together with the liberal Jewish movement anymore. There is some sense in it, because it is different, it was different, but it seemed a little bit ungrateful at a time.

*What was it like for you, going to all the different services?*

To us it was work.

*You didn't have an opinion?*

We had opinions, but we wouldn't argue about it. I had great respect for her and when we had nowhere to go, she saw to it that we did find somewhere. They were all so different, Dr Salzberger was very different. Mrs Salzberger was a very strong wife.

*Tell me about both of them.*

We were on good terms with the Salzbergers because they didn't live far from here, in walking distance, near Cricklewood Lane. We knew the whole family, very tragically one of the daughters died very young, Lore, she was a very gifted writer. And then her husband married the younger sister, you probably met her, Iska. Dr Salzberger was very learned, he studied a lot, he was a careful and knowledgeable preacher. We respected Salzberger very much.

*So you worked with both of them, Rabbi Salzberger and Oberkantor Davidsohn?*

All of them, yes.

*What was the relationship between Davidson and Salzberger?*

Davidson was such a strong personality. Even physically he was overpowering, and his very deep voice, and because he used it as much, he was quite an actor. We sometimes sang together, there is a little photo. Dr Salzberger had nothing to do with the music.

*What other things do you remember if you think of the early days of Belsize Square?*

Well, it was much smaller obviously with regard to numbers, which meant that it was closer in a way. If you don't have so many people you know each one. Now I hardly know anyone - I know the same people who are still there, but they get fewer and fewer. There were some very fine people, there had to be to start such an undertaking. But of course, it was very useful that everybody lived round Swiss Cottage. At that time there was Dorice Café, which you have probably heard of. If you passed by, who sat there? There was *Oberkantor* Davidsohn, yes, yes. It was on Finchley Road, on the side where Waitrose is, a little bit further, quite nice. And on the other side there was

a café which was there for a long time, no it was a restaurant, the Cosmo, you met everybody there. So around Swiss Cottage there were the refugees, like the Jews did in the East End, they moved further out. And now they come to the synagogue from quite far, don't they.

*Your parents, where they involved in the synagogue?*

No, no, no. My father went to the orthodox synagogue in Golders Green, the Munk synagogue. The Munk Shul, which is very orthodox, I don't know if my father went there. For my mother Belsize Square was much too liberal. My father unfortunately died before David had his Bar Mitzvah. And my mother wouldn't go to this shul because it's too far, she couldn't walk that far. She wouldn't ride on Shabbat. She did come to the tea which we gave in Belsize, in the afternoon, where my old teacher, the rabbi from Lessingstraße, Berlin, - I mustn't forget that name, it's really stupid. He was a rabbi with a long beard in Lessingstraße and he taught me Hebrew in classes. I loved studying, I really loved it. I was invited to his house, they had nine children. He always said I should learn Greek, he said, you would love it, you have a feeling for Hebrew and this is the same. I was fascinated by the way words are connected and built and used, and what you can do with them. Dr Kohn, of course! He came to the reception, to the afternoon bar mitzvah. It was 1957, my mother died 1958. He gave a *droshe* (sermon). For my mother that was heaven. We had some wonderful people there, and real singing teachers, Sabine Kalter was there, too, she was a great artist, opera singer in Hamburg, died also too young. I really learned a lot from her, she was a great leader singer, she sang during the war in the big concerts, Paul played for her. So we had a full house, there was Dr Kohn, he was fond of me. We all stood around, my mother said, that was the only thing which was really worthwhile. That was the important thing at a Bar Mitzvah, some Jewish wisdom was given, it pleased her very much, I was glad for her.

Who was the rabbi?

Dr Salzberger, it was his last one.

*Let's go further back to the war and the end of the war. When you became involved in Belsize Square, did you become members?*

Yes, of course we became members. We were very happy there. People came with more or less the same background.

*What did it mean for you to belong to the synagogue?*

I was still very religious when I sang the soli. I felt I couldn't sing without conviction, I was convinced by what I sang and I could never be anything else but a Jewess. For me, the wonderful, the greatest things which a religion has altogether given to mankind, I think are what we have given. For instance, I got further and further away from organised religion, but on Shabbat I light the candles, because to me this is a gift - isn't it wonderful that every human being, your slaves, your workers, the animals, everybody should have the chance to have a rest. It's great, and we have given it to the world. And the psalms, I adore the psalms. Every 50 years, the land should be left in order to recover, every seven years. And the debts you were owed, after so many

years, cross them out. These are great things, I am a very proud Jewess. But I don't need to go to synagogue for that.

*When you joined the religion was very important for you?*

Oh yes.

*What was the relationship between the music and the religion?*

It was one, really. During the high holydays for example, I sang the whole day and fasted the whole day. Until, after one Yom Kippur I fainted and they said, it's a bit too much, isn't it. But you forget yourself because you don't need to eat, you have got the spiritual nourishment. When I am happy, I sing, when I am sad I also, I am very moved in a religious way by some music. Mozart especially. But not only that. There is something which I don't understand and can't express, something much higher. Just as I am deeply moved by nature.

*Did you feel at home with the kind of service?*

Yes, I did not really know the ultra-orthodox. What we sing and what we used is exactly what they used in Oranienburger Straße, no different. I didn't go with my father to the services, that was his pleasure. But my mother, as a woman, that was I suppose also from the East, it didn't matter so much that a woman went to the synagogue as long as you read, there is a special book for women. She didn't have the knowledge. Her belief was very earthy. Her mother, the same wonderful grandmother who I wished I had known better, must have been an extraordinary woman, because my mother always told me she knew a great deal, she was very knowledgeable, so much so that there were times when the rabbi came to talk things over with her, to learn her opinion of a query. She was also a wonderful woman, doing good sounds awful, being charitable in a quiet way. Every Shabbat, my mother said, she quietly went, before Shabbat started, to the back streets, to the back of houses. And she had parcels with candles to give to people. She lived Judaism. She gave the candles because my grandfather was a candlemaker.

*So Belsize Square was for you a continuation of the service in Berlin?*

Yes, very much so. I knew all the Lewandowski stuff. They had some new compositions, I didn't agree, but OK, it was not my decision.

*If you look at the history of the synagogue, what were the important changes, the different rabbis, or the end of the war?*

I can't judge that, because I wasn't there at the very beginning. No, I don't think I can say anything about this. I will say this: Belsize Square is very blessed with a lot of wonderful members who did the work, and there were youngsters, now the generation of Henry, he is one of them, and there is Charles, he is now in Germany to my great astonishment. I knew Charles and Charles's mother, of course. Well, it's so interesting, there were some mothers who clung very close to their sons. Another one was Willy Stern. He was one of the people who did most for the synagogue. He was a very quiet man, very nice, a very charming man, I liked him very much. He lived not

far from the synagogue with a wonderful old mother, he never married, because he lived for his mother. He pushed her in the wheelchair and all that. It was touching to see, but it was not very good for him in a way. It's a great problem, when mothers can't let go - well, I don't know. Willy Stern was one of the really important people, who did always quietly, always without talking about it, in every way he was there, financially, with anything that had to be done, you could always rely on Willy.

*Do you think the close connection between mothers and sons had to do with the fact that they were refugees?*

Partly, I think. Well, when the father wasn't there anymore, sometimes we don't know where the father was, of course I can understand it. Thinking of myself having only one child, there is always a bit of - I could have, I should have more children, in a way I am sorry now, I blame myself, because I could have had more. But we were building up our lives, especially as musicians, away from the synagogue, too, and it was hard. Even so with David, my sister was there to look after him. For instance, we had a concert tour in Belgium and Luxembourg, you know, it was difficult. It was perhaps selfish. But what I do know is that I would never, never have allowed David to live for me and not to live his own life, that I think is so wrong. But again, it's not for me to talk about that.

Other people who were there, one of my favourite couples, in Swiss Cottage - they are still members - Norbert and Miriam Kohn, they are wonderful people. Always there to help. Always doing things quietly, lovely people.

*How was the general atmosphere, was it a warm atmosphere?*

Yes. We were never amongst the leaders of the congregation with regards being members of the board. I remember *Oberkantor* Davidsohn, we were asked twice, why don't we join the Lodge. '*Meine lieben Lichtensterns, alles was sie wollen, ist, sie auszusaugen.* They always want things from them, leave them alone'. So we never became members, not because of Davidsohn, because we didn't want to. Paul came from Vienna, he was an artist in every way. I had, fortunately, the Eastern Jewish background which I am very proud of and there were these, some of them, very snobbish German Jews.

*Can you give me some examples?*

One example was when I did Yiddish songs. One, he is a great friend, he said, my mother, if she would have heard Yiddish songs she would have spat. This kind of thing, you know. Or who would always talk about '*Die deutsche Kultur*', which is true all right, there is something to be grateful for, but it can also go over the top.

*What about other families in the community?*

Yes, they were large families some of them, you know the Alexander family for instance. Then there are the very fine Lilian and Herbert Levy, especially Herbert, he is very fine and very quiet and yet he does a great deal. Herbert comes from a very cultural background, and I really admire them very much. That's already a younger generation of course. So many, of course the Kuttners, there were two, Dr Kuttner,

Henry's father, was an exceptionally fine man, these were German Jews with a German Jewish background and culture whom I admired enormously. They wouldn't have boasted about it. But the Kuttners were a fine family, also the aunt, the whole family. I would call them the cornerstones of Belsize Square, not selfish, they wanted to establish something for the Jews who came from this German background. And who would have lost the traditional music and the way the festivals were and all that.

*Could we talk about your work with the choir?*

I started very early and sang whenever the choir was needed, and it was needed all the time. I did the solos. We were very, very involved with the synagogue altogether, obviously, through the music and not only the singing and Paul's playing, but also the teaching. We both taught. Any activities the children were involved - we were involved.

*Was the music for you one of the pillars of the community?*

Yes. I do think without the music the synagogue wouldn't have been what it was and became. People came and heard, Lewandowski's melodies are very easy on the ear, for people who had never heard them, and that's beautiful. The music, go and listen in Belsize Square, it's a nice service and many people came from outside for festivals. We had a lot of comments about the choir, the choir wasn't always wonderful, but it was a good standard.

*Were there always members in the choir or were they hired?*

As far as possible, if there were people in the synagogue, especially in the beginning, and there were some, people who had sung in Germany already, the Kuttners for example, they were a very active family, and a very musical one. And all the members sang sooner or later in the choir. There was a Mrs Koschkaschinski from Germany, at a time she was called the nightingale, she sang some programme in the *Rundfunk*. She was quite well-known then, when she came to us, she was quite elderly, not so elderly, we were also interned together. She was also one of the sopranos. Then later on some of our people died and we had to hire, to engage professionals, always professionals. Yes, the Belsize Square synagogue choir had a good reputation, no doubt about that.

*There was a high professional standard?*

Yes. Not amateurs, no.

*That was always understood?*

Yes. I must say Davidsohn was a very professional singer. And he had a very good standard. And Paul, my husband, was a very strict taskmaster with regard to the music not to be *verschlampt*, what's *verschlampt* in English? Can't think of it now. No, it had to be just so, quite rightly. And some days he was so busy that we had another professional organist, non-Jewish, he was also very good. The conductors were not professional conductors, but they were enthusiastic and they knew the music inside

out. Again, there was the Kuttner family, Dr Kuttner, who was a dentist, was very musical and he knew the music so well and he conducted for a long time. Then there was Eric Goodman, who was very musical and not a professional musician. And now and then Paul would give advice, with regard to tempi and all that. Whoever was the chazan, when you have a service the chazan is in the middle of it and is the leader in a way, and the choirmaster must follow, you can't make your own rules.

*The understanding was always that it should be a professional choir, providing a high standard?*

Yes. Some people started had started composing and there were also some compositions where the standard was not as I think it should have been. Gradually, especially with Belsize Square Synagogue, it became very much like a big family which is good in many ways. But of course, there are also different opinions in families and strives in families. It would not be normal to expect that everyone is of the same opinion. But that doesn't belong here.

*How did it become a family?*

Well, it started almost as one because people had the same background, that's always the telling point. You come from the same background, you are in the beginning for some time in strange surroundings under difficult conditions. You hang together. That is the way you stay alive. Also with regard to cultural background, that was more or less the same. *Gutbürgerlich, gute Erziehung*. For some who came from a little bit more east, that showed sometimes, with regard to me with my Yiddish songs.

Also with regard to the running of the synagogue, we didn't have so many means, they started in a small way, first in a flat, then there was the house which was really a private dwelling which was used as it was. For a long time, nothing could be done to enlarge it, that all came much later. So, like a family is building up, they are building up their lives from small beginnings to more effort and more opportunity, and then it grows and you build on perhaps and you can move to a bigger house. That's what happened. It was fortunate, good foresight, that there was enough space surrounding this private house, that they could enlarge. Now it is about right, I think. It was expanding all the time. There was a time when it was shrinking a little bit because people were dying off. Actually, that is a very important point, since many of the people who started it were not so young. For instance, you have heard of the Sterns, Willy Stern, we were good friends. He was in a very quiet way a great important member, a builder, I would call him, of the synagogue. In every way, financially and so on. He was quiet, very dignified and very, very loveable. There were others. You make me think of it now, I don't think we had any who went away, turned off this background, I don't think so.

*What do you mean?*

Well, it would have been possible for someone to say, well, we live in England now, I want different surroundings, perhaps marry an English Jewish girl. I don't think that happened, I think on the whole people were rather drawn in from outside. There was this feeling of a cushion background, a certain kind of warmth. And the main thing for so many people, everybody knew everybody. And many also were together apart from

the synagogue, travelling together perhaps and certainly being together in their different homes. The Belsize Square Synagogue I think is altogether known as unique in its way, certainly unique.

*You had an interesting position, as you worked there.*

Yes, and taught there, and were great friends with quite a number of them. We were not as active as we could have been. We after all had our own life to live as musicians. We travelled, gave concerts, sometimes you had to balance, if you had a concert somewhere in the north, Manchester or so, and it was the weekend, somebody else had to sing my things.

*What about your social life, were there many overlaps or did you have friends from different circles?*

Yes, certainly. Through music. But not only. We were very friendly with the Dollingers, Joe and Stella, and the Goodmans. But for me, especially when I started with the children, that was for me a very, very important chapter. I was trained because you had to be trained for something in Germany, if possible, to work with children. I don't know if I mentioned it already, I had my own little kindergarten for a short while and I loved to be with children. I enjoyed that very much. Some of the children were pupils of Paul's, for the piano, that overlapped.

*And then they came for singing to you?*

Yes. And then it was suggested later on, why should not the children have their own service, with the children, led by the children.

*When did the children service start?*

I really can't put a year to it. But it went on for a long time, and that was a lot of work. Very enjoyable, but hard work. It took time, but it was a good thing.

*From when to when did you work with the children's choir?*

Well, we started it, there was no choir before. We taught classes and that means we sang with the classes. Mrs Salzberger used to say, she's probably right, she said when she came back - they had travelled in America - she had heard children's choirs in the synagogue, and why don't we have one. That's probably when it started. It became a really important feature, as I said, we went all over London, to different places with the children's choir. In the old age homes, it was especially important, because for old people children are sunshine. The children loved it, too, they were spoiled there. That was something well done. And then we enlarged it, we asked Sue and Peter and other pupils of mine to come and sing. Very enjoyable.

*The children were all members?*

Yes, sometimes the children who were instrumentalists came from outside. So that was mixed, it was never boring. It never went so far, oh, we do the same old songs, there was always variety.

*Was there a lot of pressure on these children to perform?*

No! They loved it! No. And we were asked by the BBC, I don't know how that came about. The BBC - I have got letters about all that - had a programme, what was it called, for Sunday mornings, and one woman came for a rehearsal. I don't know who told them about it. And they sang hymns, that's what they wanted. And she recorded them, and she said they are good enough to be broadcast, live broadcast, which was done. It was also in the synagogue, the parents said, did you hear the children? It was fun, it all added to the prestige.

It was certainly unique in its way. When you have the melodies which had been almost completely unknown in synagogues in England then taken over, we had brought them, we had sung them, they were listened to and they were then also adapted by other synagogues, if it wasn't too orthodox.

*What about language and music, were there also ever Lieder performances?*

This is actually important, Davidsohn started with that. He was a very cultured musician. He had people who were very much against him. Well, he was a bit of a - he had been an *Oberkantor* in Germany, not just a *Kantor*, and he was very proud of that. And he was rightly proud of his knowledge and his voice and his experience and he could be a little bit dictatorial. Strong personality. When Joe came, Joe Dollinger, who was very sweet natured. He couldn't be bothered, he sang, and he understood what he sang, but he did not want to be involved with any politics.

And Paul and I were exactly the same, that's why we got on so very well. But with Davidsohn it was different, Davidsohn was there and his presence was felt. And he saw to it that it was felt. But we got on very well.

*I asked you about German and the Lieder.*

Yes, and because he had the German culture, a rich musical culture in him, he said, this is not enough, we have to have concerts. He started the Sunday concerts, and they were very good.

*With Melitta Heim?*

Melitta Heim to start with. And then later on, Melitta died and then Paul played. We had excellent concerts.

*What sort of music was played?*

Well, when it came to songs, it was Lieder. Schubert of course, well, it depended which artist was singing or performing. Unfortunately, I have no materials with regard to the Sunday concerts, maybe Henry may know much more about it, maybe he had some material.

*I am interested whether there were certain choices made regarding the music or using German songs.*

Certainly, that always went down very well. Obviously, people knew the culture. Later on, the children, many of them didn't speak any German anymore and for them it's just like now for me in Osmond House, all these homes who had refugees. Amongst the hundreds of songs which we prepared and sang with them, there were German songs. And some Israeli. I had to change especially the last 10 years, I took out, I had to rearrange all my music, because the German songs are not understood by many now, very few. In this this particular home, many residents are senile and it is necessary to catch their attention. And if you come with Schubertlieder they have not heard, their attention wanders. So that's changed very much.

*But there wasn't a stigma attached, because people didn't want to speak German.*

That's right. I remember when my son was born and when he started talking, I was with him on buses, or shopping, I wouldn't speak German. David was born in 44, but even after the war, you did not. It would have been very unpleasant. But within the walls of the synagogue, even there, up to now I haven't even thought about it. You spoke English. The Lodge, that went on still, 'Herr Dr' and so, you kept on with it, it was just in your blood. No, we spoke English, so much so that we forgot German.

*In the community, what language was spoken?*

Always English, later on. For instance, lectures or talks, getting together, for me, the developing came gradually and so naturally, so you aren't conscious of it. But you are quite right, there must have been a step somehow, and I can't really recall it, it's when the younger generation came up. For Dr Salzberger, he gave his sermons in German. For Kokotek it was English.

*What about your husband, which language did you speak together?*

We spoke English. That must have been psychological. When my parents were still alive, that was different of course, for them it was difficult, so we spoke German with them. But then later on it was English. I think psychologically, you wanted to forget. You didn't want to live in the past. Now it goes back, I regret it in a way, because I have forgotten some. And sometimes we have visitors, when we had a meeting there about Kafka, that's a different chapter in my life, there was a room full of people. Perhaps a tenth of them were Germans. I had to start thinking and had to dig it up again. And it comes back of course, but you start looking for words. It's very interesting, one forgot in those years that there was a culture which we carried. And that a culture, whatever happened, is still worthwhile keeping. But you learn by experience.

*But the Lieder were sung?*

Oh yes. I could never sing Schubert in English, I find that so ridiculous. I always got upset when people sang Schubert Lieder in translation, small concerts or so, it doesn't work.

Were there particular preferences?

*When we gave concerts, I always had at the end a Wunsch - it was all Yiddish.*

*What did people want?*

Well, something really well known. I can't remember, with German Lieder which was, let's say, pure German art. Maybe a few ended with a jolly, well known song, that could be. There were regular concerts given in the East End organized by Mr Benjamin, very high standard, I have got all the programmes here. There also we didn't sing only Hebrew, Yiddish, no, German, I sang folksongs in 6 different languages, in order to have the variety. But there, certainly later on, we always ended up with Israeli and Yiddish songs. Because it was a Jewish cultural centre, so it should be Jewish culture, if possible.

*Was there a shift in the music in the synagogue?*

No, this was an afternoon of pure art, it didn't matter where it came from. I mean I wouldn't have sung Wagner, but then I don't like Wagner anyway. Quite apart from Adolf and all that. I am not terribly keen on Strauss either, with some exceptions. Hugo Wolf was very much liked. Of course, the Heine words, the lyrics, are so beautiful.

*The music is very powerful.*

Yes, emotionally, of course.

*And there is an identity, it's in a way neutral, I mean in the English context I would imagine, because that's not a politicised identity in a way. It's something one could maintain.*

Of course. And the great composers lived long before all that happened, again, apart from Strauss. But Wolf was later.

*Did you see yourself on a mission?*

No, never. To sing, this was my life, I was very happy to be able to, both Paul and I, to spend our lives with music.

*I meant to change the English culture, did you see yourself as a bridge?*

No. I didn't have these thoughts. Not at all. But with regard to English, I didn't sing a lot of English songs, that's interesting actually. But that was because I didn't know them, no, we learnt some of course, studied them. I sang English songs, I could look it up, I can't remember now. And especially English folk songs, which are lovely.

*Until when were you active, musically, in the synagogue?*

It was in the seventies - what happened afterwards? I think we stopped more or less, yes, long before Paul died which was nine years ago, long before he was ill. Paul was also considerably older than I am and he, especially in the later years, wasn't all that happy playing in the synagogues. In fact, in later years, all we did was welfare work, mainly for Israel. With different choirs. And that was very satisfying, there was nothing like every Shabbat, the regularity, it was more according to how we could manage, how we arranged our time and life.

There wasn't a split or quarrel or anything like that, it was very gradual. And you know, also the people like the Kuttner family, with all the family members there was great understanding, also *was die Menschlichkeit betrifft*. And some of the synagogue members became quite posh. One thing is quite funny - most of them had cars but Paul and Hanni Lichtenstern didn't have a car. Paul was so straightforward, so simple, he never pretended. He started riding a bicycle, I don't think he came to the synagogue, I am not quite sure he dared that. Later on, I always fall off bicycles, so he decided he is going to buy a motorbike. That was lovely! I was sitting behind him and that's how we went to the synagogue. And it was a joke, did you see the Lichtensterns! We were very happy. But then unfortunately after some years, we travelled to the south coast, wonderful, so free and easy. But unfortunately, we had an accident. We came out of West End Lane and a car came by and hit us. Fortunately, it was not a bad accident. The thing was finished, Paul had damage to his hand, and as a pianist that was very bad, apart from everything else. His former pupil, who had helped bringing him over, he was a solicitor and he said 'you must be paid compensation'. It was not much, £200 or something, but it was many years ago, and it was enough to buy a second-hand car. Paul was very good, he passed his test at the first go, and the Lichtensterns had a car.

We never pretended, we were what we were, we were quite happy with what we had. We never wanted to have restitution from Germany, we didn't want anything to do with that. And one of our members, Dr Spitzer from Germany, who knew me, her child was in my kindergarten, said: 'you are really stupid - why don't you want something which belongs to you, you lost a lot'.

When did your bike accident happen?

There should be some paper somewhere where I could find it. That must have been the 60s.

*The issue of restitution, was it a big issue in the community?*

Oh yes. The community received money from there, and the members as well. Henry will know much more about it.

*Did you claim restitution?*

Paul did, I didn't. Paul had a career already, so he lost a great deal, but that didn't apply to me.

*When did he apply?*

I have got it somewhere, yes, I think it must have been the early 60s.

*Was that a big help?*

Yes, of course. We have been here since 1959. Oh, so it must have been much earlier. In the 50s, certainly, in the early 50s. Actually, yes, our poor moped, we didn't have it for many years I just realised, it seemed longer. We really enjoyed it, and David enjoyed it.

*Were you regarded as a sort of bohemian?*

Well, a little bit. The Lichtensterns, even my family sometimes said, you are a bit odd, aren't you. OK, so we are odd.

*What do you think Belsize Square means to you and your life?*

Oh, very important. It would be wrong to deny that, and I wouldn't deny that. No, because it was the time in our lives, we could have managed, we would have survived without Belsize Square, because Paul had connections from the beginning with other synagogues. Then later on concerts and teachings and all of that. We had a very, very active life through music. And actually quite often I think, talking about it now, when people asked us, oh, come and see us or so - we were busy weekends. That is quite true. It was partly the way we lived. Yes, an important part in many ways. Even now, Henry is a good friend, we are very fond of him, and his sister, although I don't see her. I mentioned Eric Goodman, his wife is still alive, Franzie, we telephone every week. I don't see her much, I haven't seen her for ages, because it's a long way and she is very handicapped. Henry's sister comes and sees her and helps her. Henry has been away now, he sent her a card. Eric did a great deal for the synagogue, he was a very good person, gifted in his way, Franzie sang in the choir, she had a good voice, she was a professional singer. She is now 90 and very handicapped.

Judaism means that you should look after your brother. For me, Judaism is important because of its moral laws. Like the Shabbat, which I keep, I light the candles myself, because I think it is a wonderful gift which Judaism has given us. Nobody thought of it, let there be one day where everybody is free, and nobody works, not yourself, not the donkey. All that is in the Bible. A synagogue should have that in the centre of its work.

*How do you see the future of the synagogue?*

It doesn't worry me much. [laughs] I wish it very well. I am impressed, I don't know when I was last in the synagogue, it's a long time ago, but I am impressed because I do think they do a great deal of - I am always happy to get the paper, the first thing I read is from the children, they are wonderful, I still love them. They are original, witty, very good. And there is a great deal done, I can see that from the functions, new ideas. It's a very vibrant next generation apparently, I admire that. But it's past history for me, or rather, it's future and future is receding from me. So, it doesn't bother me either.

After all these years, what is it, 60 years now, it's not measuring in time, it's a short time, but they have achieved a great deal. And what is also good, this is the synagogue, this is an important point, which accepted mixed marriages. That is a very important point, I am all for it. And I think it has been very successful and that it brought a new kind of congregation, apart from the Liberal synagogues, but then the Liberal movement is much more English. And the background, the cultural background can't be erased, it shouldn't be either, it goes from generation to generation. I don't know how it will be, with mixed marriages and so on, it depends how strong the Jewish part is, it may change. There is still a different atmosphere I should think, especially also through the music. The music is very important in that respect, that shows us one part where Belsize Square is unique. And the importance of the chazan is another part. The Liberal synagogues have not got a chazan. Nor did Miss Montagu's have a chazan. So there you are, this is an important difference again.

*Do you ever attend a service at Belsize?*

Hardly ever. Because I am feeling already a bit of an outsider, although people who know me, they are very sweet. When I come, I don't sit there and listen, I sing. The melodies are still there, I like singing them. I don't always agree with what I hear from the choir. But they are alright. If you are in the profession, you are always more critical.

*Do you go to any other synagogues?*

No. I am very much, it sounds dreadful, but I don't need the synagogue. I think our rabbi is a good, a fine speaker, he has a good intellect. I enjoy listening to him, he has a sense of humour and he has done well. So much has happened, all sorts of things. How many rabbis did I know, Salzberger, Kokotek, it's not a lot! When Rodney came, of course, he was quite a young man, certainly didn't have white hair or a beard.

*You said it was important that people shared the same background. Was the past something that people explicitly talked about or was it more that it was a common identity?*

Well, there were some people who said, the way we used to do it, in our synagogue, that came up now and then. But again, since we were not *gesellschaftlich engagiert* - what were we talking about?

*Whether or not there was a change.*

Within the synagogue? There was also a change every time one of the functionaries changed. Actually, we had another chazan in-between, he was a professional singer, too.

*For a very short time?*

HL: Yes, a fine voice. The one who everybody adored was Joe Dollinger. Also the children loved him and he loved them. They always hung around him.

*He died very recently, didn't he?*

Well, a few years ago. We were not here at that funeral; it was absolutely full.

*I saw his tombstone, I went to the cemetery last week with Henry, he took me, I wanted to see the Holocaust memorial. In Willesden. That's where he is buried.*

It's such a pity, it's an awful space there.

*The memorial?*

**No, I am talking of the grounds altogether. It's in the middle of - it's very strange, I don't like it. I am looking forward to being in Hoop Lane,** where Paul is, and my sister. It's like a beautiful park, it's so lovely. So peaceful. There are two cemeteries, one is the liberal synagogue, Jacqueline du Pré is there for instance, and my wonderful singing teachers. And on the other side it's where you are cremated. And I believe cremation is the only way to be finished.

*Why?*

Because it's clean. It's natural, it goes into the earth, does something good perhaps, it doesn't take space. Look what's happening to the place, where will it go to? It's so idiotic. Just like the Hindus believe the same. It's not only logical, it is beautiful, it is wonderful.

*Was the past in Germany discussed among the members?*

I really cannot answer that. For the reason that people who were socially together would of course have talked about it, and you knew it if you wanted to know the background. With regard to the music, yes, we would say, to which synagogue did you belong to in Germany, where you came from in Berlin. I would tell them this kind of thing, in connection with the synagogue. And then it didn't take very long that you stopped thinking back and longing perhaps to be back. For some of the people nothing would be ever as good as it was in Germany. But fortunately, the next generation doesn't buy this at all. But then, one of our former members, very early members, he was also a friend of Henry's - Charles Goodman. Charles - Karl Heinz - went back to Germany. I could understand that. Not only because I know quite a number of young generations of Germans, who I admire enormously. Some of them are now working with us in the homes. Last week I introduced myself saying that I come from Germany and he said, 'oh lovely'.

*You mean young German who come to spend time in the UK?*

Yes, they do it instead of military service.

*Aktion Sühnezeichen.*

That's right.

Before that, years before, we went on holiday, Paul and I, we were in Italy. We stayed in an Italian guesthouse, a farm, beautiful, and there were quite a number of young Germans. We got on very well because we understood each other, we could talk quite openly. This generation is fine, you know. But their parents, grandparents, that would be very difficult. But that's why I say I find it difficult - Karl Heinz went back because he needed the German culture. He had the German culture within him. He was very happy, he felt at home immediately.

*You wouldn't have considered to go back?*

No, no. My memory is too strong. I only left, as you know, in 1939, I have seen too much and heard too much. I couldn't. You know, Germany invited the *alten Berliner*, that's very good, I get the papers, which is very good, they are doing very good work. We were invited, and for years I wouldn't go. And then my sister went and friends went, and then one day we said, alright, we will go for this one. I felt so cold, such a stranger, I was a tourist. Until we had a luncheon or dinner together with some of the people from the senate. I felt I needed to speak - you know? And we had a very open discussion, and it was very good. I felt better.

*About what?*

About the Hitler years, and about what I saw and felt. And that it is not true that the German people were overwhelmed. I was there, I saw women carrying ladders, because Hitler would come a certain road, and they wanted to see him. They wanted to see their *Führer*. They were brainwashed. In a way, it was almost a physical transformation, but that's not what we want to talk about.

*When did you go back, when was that?*

I think it was the early 80s, quite late. My sister had a very close German friend, they used to work together at the Deutsche Bank, and Paul had very good friends, so they came. It is true, there were people who suffered and who couldn't wait until it's finished, of course, we know that. And we also know that outside of Germany, there were many in England and others, too, people who thought it was wonderful, they would have liked something like that here. Mosley. So there are very few pure white innocent people in the high places.

*Do you think you transmitted of your German-Jewish identity to your son?*

Well, you see, I never called myself a German Jew. I wasn't! My parents came from the East, I am a proper *Ostjude*, oh, yes. You could spit on me if you like. [laughs] That's another thing, when people talked about the German culture, German culture, it's not only Beethoven or Schubert, you can't blame them, but culture is wider than that, it's not a German word only. My father and mother had their own culture. Unfortunately, they wanted to become very German, I suppose. And there was no Yiddish spoken, anything like that. I had to acquire that later. If you have lived a long life, like I have, it's quite amazing through how many phases of history you lived, what happened altogether in this century. I was born in 1916. So almost the whole century. That has never happened before, with regard to technology of course, it's

tremendous. So much so, there was an article in the Observer last week about the dangers of the latest virtual reality - but that doesn't belong here.

*In terms of your identity, how do you see yourself?*

I see myself as a human being with a strong Jewish background, love for Judaism and Jewish culture, which includes the Jewish culture very much, as a very fortunate human being. I was blessed with a voice that I could use still use. And I am very grateful for all that. And I had Paul who was very exceptional human being, and a very wonderful son, who couldn't be better - so I have nothing to complain of.

*Do you think your son and your grandchildren continue your identity of Jewish?*

Yes, I think without my Jewish background I would be a different human being. And I am very conscious of that; there would be a lot missing. Much more than I can tell you now. Here in England, wonderful, English-Jewish - it doesn't belong here - very outstanding people, artists. There was also Moshe Oved who was a great influence in my life, who had a famous Jewellery shop, he came from Poland. His granddaughter will come this afternoon... These are all his books, all in Yiddish. [she is showing books].

*What does it say: 'For my inspiring friend'.*

That was 1952.

*I have not heard of him.*

No, you wouldn't. He wouldn't have known of me if I hadn't been singing Yiddish songs, that's how we got together. He also made sculptures later on, that was an exhibition at Foyles. And here are some pictures of him. I have quite a lot of Jewellery from him. He went to America and he sent me, from the way, greetings. He was waiting for me to come to America - it didn't work out. He was so famous internationally. Anybody who came to London, the Queen at that time, it was her shop for Jewellery.

*Who else influenced you?*

Oh yes. Through him I met Jacob Epstein, the sculptor. And if I would write it all down, it would be much too...

*You should.*

No, who is interested in that? [showing photographs]

*Now is there anything else you think is important which I haven't asked you?*

No, you have squeezed everything out of me [laughs]. I really don't know, I can't think of anything.

*You gave me a good idea of the musical side of Belsize Square.*

[looking at photographs]

*When did you officially stop working in Belsize Square?*

In the mid-1970s or later. A long time ago.

*Since then, do you still go back once in a while?*

Yes, I think sometimes they asked me and I would I help.

*Was it in the mid-seventies that you became involved in the voluntary work?*

No, that was a bit later. In the 80s I should think. No, we didn't stop then, it went on longer. Of course we went on longer. All the concerts with the children's choir, that was later.

There was one thing which I wanted you to see, I can't find it. I have been asked about the development of the Jewish song, and I gave a lecture. Illustrated by song, with the choir, the women's choir. And that somehow got known and I had a call from the founder of the London Music Club, I don't know if it is still in existence. He said, could we come and give a lecture to a non-Jewish audience about that, and they hired the lecture hall, and we gave this illustrated lecture. And it was sold out and had to be repeated. I was very pleased. Paul also gave lectures.

*You seem to have been an amazing team.*

Yes, we had such a colourful life. We were never bored. Really, I feel so sorry for people who had nine to four jobs. Every day there was something different, there was a phone call, 'can you do this and this', sometimes there were disappointments as well, but we were never bored. That is a wonderful thing, you know.

*Thank you very much for the interview.*

My pleasure. You have been a joy to talk to.